

That cause, my friends in this Chamber, is our very democracy, and that is why we won't stop. Our Nation was founded on the ideals of democracy, and we have seen for ourselves in this building how we can't afford to take it for granted.

We have a lot of work to do in rebuilding our country. And, no, we should not go home tomorrow. No, we should not, not when this is at stake. We must stand up for the salvation of our democracy.

And each day that we delay, it gets harder and harder to undo what is being done. We owe it to our country and to the future generation of Americans to take care of this country.

We are the stewards, my friends, of this Nation right now and our democracy. So many people before us have found a way to do the right thing. And in the words of Bob Dole, in a first-class democracy, the people deserve better than being treated like second-class citizens.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I have come to this floor to speak on a matter that is very local to Alaska, very important to Alaska. But before I begin my comments, I want to acknowledge a few of the comments of my friend from Minnesota.

Clearly, we share some of the same passions about the protections of our democracy, and I would absolutely agree that key and most fundamental is that right to vote. And I have clearly expressed that we, as lawmakers, need to be there to ensure that our elections are free, fair, and accessible to all, that barriers to voting need to be addressed.

She has noted that I have joined with others to try to address what I believe are some of those impediments to voting through a measure that has been proposed to the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. It is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, in my view, but I do think that it is something that is worthy of the debate. I was going to call it grand debate on the floor, but as she appropriately points out, there is not a lot of grand debate that goes on. More often than not, it is individuals who are speaking to those who are taking the time out of their day to tune in to C-SPAN.

But these are important discussions for us to have. But I also recognize that enduring legislation comes about not because one party is able to make that happen on their own. Enduring legislation, whether it is the Civil Rights Act or whether it was the Voting Rights Act—the enduring legislation that stays with us for generations and decades—is that that is achieved when we have come together.

We will never—it is very, very difficult to get entire consent of the body. But when we can achieve that bipartisan support and a recognition that this is good for both parties, good for all areas of America, this is when we do

our best, when we come together to address these.

And I hear the clear frustration that she has expressed, but I also recognize that how we do what we do is important. And if we peel away the last vestiges of protection for minority rights in the Senate, the Senate becomes a smaller version of the House, where you are able to effectively move things through just by the raw numbers.

And so these are hard, these are challenging, these are worthy of our further and additional efforts. But I would remind us that as we are seeking to make these generational differences, as we are seeking to provide for these enduring protections for democracy, that how we get there is also a matter of importance to this body.

(The remarks of Ms. MURKOWSKI pertaining to the submission of S. Res. 482 are printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Ms. MURKOWSKI. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). The Senator from Utah.

VACCINES

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I am here on the Senate floor now for the 21st time specifically to oppose President Biden's sweeping vaccine mandates.

I have introduced over a dozen bills to one way or another limit, clarify, or counteract the mandates. Every time I have come to ask the Senate to pass what should, frankly, be uncontroversial matters, one of my colleagues or another from the other side of the aisle has come to object. This is unfortunate. It is unfortunate, really, for a number of reasons.

These mandates, while currently being challenged in court in a number of jurisdictions, show the terrible power that even the threat of a vaccine mandate can wield. Businesses across the country are suspending, punishing, and firing employees who haven't had the COVID shot. The threat of the mandate is making it harder for everyday American families just to put food on the table and to do so, moreover, in increasingly difficult economic times.

Now, these are not our enemies. These are not people to be feared. These are not people to shun or loathe entirely, as the mandates seem to suggest. No. No. These are our friends and our neighbors. These are mothers and fathers. These are people who, like far too many Americans, are just struggling to get by.

I am going to continue to fight for them and to protect them because they understand something that President Biden has yet to accept even though, deep down, I know he does know it, and that is, this isn't right. It is not right for him to do. It is not right constitutionally for about a dozen reasons, but it is also just not right morally.

It is a morally unacceptable proposition to suggest that someone should get fired just because they don't conform to Presidential medical orthodoxy. It is immoral to tell someone

that their ability to put food on the table for their children depends on whether they get a shot—a shot that they may or may not want; a shot that may or may not conflict with their religious or sincerely held beliefs, that might be contraindicated by one or more conditions, resulting in their doctors advising them not to get the shot.

This is not something that anyone should do. In fact, the American people agree. According to a recent Axios poll, only 14 percent of Americans—just 14 out of every 100 Americans—agree with the apparent position of the President of the United States that if someone doesn't get the shot, they should be fired. I would imagine it is even fewer than that. Fourteen out of a hundred isn't very many to begin with, but I am pretty sure it is even fewer than that—far fewer—who would say that it is OK for one person within the Federal Government to decide to fire everyone who doesn't comply within the government and also to tell private employers that they will receive crippling, company-destroying fines—that no company, not even the wealthiest out there, could live with—if they don't fire every one of their employees or otherwise take adverse action against them in their declining to take the shot. It is not OK.

In this effort, I have, to be sure, been supremely clear. I am not in any way against the COVID-19 vaccinations—quite to the contrary. I have been vaccinated. I have encouraged people to seek out all the relevant information and be vaccinated. I believe that the COVID-19 vaccines are keeping countless Americans safe from the harm threatened by the COVID-19 virus.

This is different than that. As a matter of fact, there is an undercut, and it can't offset the fact that this mandate is pushing government control beyond the constitutional limits and into the private decisions of the American people.

That is why I am against all of these mandates for all age groups, and that is why I have come to the Senate floor repeatedly to help and to call on my colleagues and President Biden himself to end this madness once and for all, to end it before it is too late, to end it before irreparable harm is inflicted on those who, for whatever reason, can't or are otherwise inclined not to comply with his directions.

I have even offered a bill, one that should be unusually, uniquely uncontroversial, but even that one met objection. It was a simple reaffirmation of parental rights that our government has respected and honored and even protected from the beginning.

My Parental Consent for Vaccination Act would simply require that any COVID-19 vaccine mandate issued by the Federal Government—to be clear, it shouldn't be issuing any at all, but any of them that it happens to issue must be a mandate that includes a requirement that informed parental consent be provided before the shot can be administered to a minor.

Now, this one is so far afield from the broader question of whether we should have these mandates at all. It is the slightly narrower question of whether the President of the United States should administer them. It really should not be controversial.

Now, allow me to put this issue in some context here. Parental consent is required for all sorts of things. Parental consent, as every parent with school-aged children knows, is required for field trips. Parental consent is required for pretty much all extracurricular activities. For that matter, it is required for many in-class activities. Parental consent is required before most schools can administer so much as a Tylenol or a baby aspirin to a child. Everyone knows that. None of that is happening without parental consent.

That is, to be sure, the right approach. It is as it should be. Despite what some candidates have said in some recent political campaigns, parents should be informed and involved in their children's education and certainly in their child's health decisions, in matters of medical treatment.

Parents, it is important to remember, are simply better equipped to make these decisions. Parents know their children, and they know their children's medical histories. Parents know their moral, their religious, and their health requirements that are, in many cases, unique to their families. It is certainly something that no government and no school can keep track of in the same way that a government or a school does. Parents also love their children—that is important here—and parents, because they love their children, have their children's best interests at heart when they make decisions affecting them.

The government can't do any of those things. It certainly can't do any of those things anywhere close to as well as a parent could. The reason for that is fairly simple. It is because government doesn't have arms with which to embrace children. The government doesn't have a heart with which to love children. The government doesn't even have eyes to see or ears to hear because government, of course, when reduced to its essence, when we really define it as what it is, is simply force. It is legally authorized violence.

Now, thank Heaven that God and the law have always assigned the primary care of their children to parents and not to government. Government is just the official actual or threatened use of force. We need government. It is also one of the many reasons we have to be careful with it just like other things that we rely on in so many ways—things like electricity, like moving water, like fire. They are all necessary to our day-to-day lives, and yet when left uncontrolled, they are dangerous and quickly become fatal when we don't exercise due caution.

This has, of course, been acknowledged for millennia. It has been written

about widely for many, many centuries, even centuries before the founding of our Republic. And it has been acknowledged since the very earliest days of our Republic.

George Washington himself warned the people about this, warning that government is itself forced and is therefore dangerous and has to be carefully managed. That is why we have a Constitution. That is why we have all these rules about government.

If men were angels, we wouldn't need government. If we had access to angels to run our government, as James Madison described it in *Federalist* 51, then we wouldn't have to bother about government abusing its power, and we wouldn't need all these rules.

But we are not angels. Men and women are not angels. And we don't have access to angels to run our government, and so we have to have rules governing the use of government. And it is for our own safety.

Nowhere is this more important than with respect to our children. That is where we can really see laid bare the essential, core facts of what government is, which is the actual or threatened use of coercive force.

Now, I also thank heaven above that God didn't assign the anonymous masses on the internet to care for children. The pressure children receive through social media, through news publications, and common video sites lacks nuance and any specific understanding of a child's health condition or history or religious beliefs.

There are even reports in prominent magazines of children being advised to commit fraud or cross State lines to be vaccinated specifically against their parents' advice, circumventing parental authority.

There is a reason why the FDA requires the fine print and the sometimes very painfully exhaustive and descriptive side-effect warnings on pharmaceutical advertisements and why those ads always encourage viewers to consult their doctors. But in the brave new world of Big Brother healthcare, students aren't encouraged to consult their parents, let alone their doctors.

Unfortunately, in some places, like here in our Nation's Capital, government has completely lost the plot. In the District of Columbia school system, for example, minors can receive medical procedures without the school even informing the parents. In other places across the Nation, this slippery slope is already leading governments to consider life-changing, school-provided medical procedures without parental notice and without parental consent.

As a parent, this thought sends shivers down my spine. I know I am not alone in that respect—far from it. Most Americans, regardless of what part of the country they come from, regardless of creed, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, or any other single factor, if they are parents, they are going to feel the same way. They don't like the idea of someone else taking

over the raising of their child. They don't like the idea of government taking over control of medical decisions on behalf of their child. You see, that is supplanting their role. That is moving them out of the way.

School-aged kids are also some of those least at risk of contracting, spreading, and suffering long-term or serious effects from COVID. The data has shown this all along. The vaccines, on the other hand, may pose a more serious risk to some young people than they do the general population. Various countries, including France and Germany, have ceased recommending some COVID vaccines to those under the age of 30 because of complications.

Again, I am not against the vaccines, but the thought of schools, social media, or, heaven forbid, government pressuring students into vaccination without parental consent is rightfully troubling. It is downright chilling, and it should not happen—not here, not in the United States of America.

While the Federal Government has almost no legitimate role in influencing local education decisions, we can make sure that the Federal Government does not endorse or, heaven forbid, mandate this dangerous approach to medical decisions for minors. That is not too much to ask. That is not something that should be controversial here in the U.S. Senate. That is not something that is remotely controversial among the good people of this country—left and right, rich and poor.

If they are parents, they are deeply disturbed by the thought of the cold, impersonal force that is government pushing them out of the way to make these medical decisions for them and for their children.

So let's provide assurance to parents and children. Let's reaffirm our commitment to supporting parents in making decisions for their children. Let's protect kids, and let's end these mandates.

They are illegal. They are unconstitutional, and they are morally indefensible.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for up to 20 minutes and Senator MENENDEZ for up to 5 minutes before the scheduled rollcall votes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. SULLIVAN pertaining to the submission of S. Res. 482 are printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Mr. SULLIVAN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 2 minutes on the next three nominations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## NOMINATIONS

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, fellow Senators, I rise today to urge an affirmative vote on all three of the next appointments that are up.

The first one is Nicholas Burns to be Ambassador to China; and next is Mr. Toloui, who is up for Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs; and also Mr. Hussain, who is up for Ambassador for International Religious Freedom. The Foreign Relations Committee has looked at all three of these very closely.

Let me spend just a moment with Mr. Burns. I have known Mr. Burns since his postings in Europe many, many years ago. If you are looking for a bipartisan person to put in the position, this is your guy. When I knew him, he was working for an administration, a Republican administration.

He has done an outstanding job, has an outstanding reputation amongst the cadre of Ambassadors, and I would urge that we confirm him and have him in place in China. This is a tough posting, as we all know, at the current time. We have got a lot of issues that exist between us and China, and certainly Ambassador Burns is the one to carry our water there.

The other two I can tell you that, without hesitation, both have been scrubbed by the committee and been asked the questions that are appropriate for both of these positions. We feel very comfortable in recommending them to the body.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I know we are about to go to the vote. Frankly, with what my distinguished colleague just said, I don't know why these aren't all voice votes.

But I understand Senator MENENDEZ is on his way here and wishes to speak. Otherwise, I would move that it be a voice vote. But out of respect for him and his committee, I will suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, while we are waiting for the Senator who wishes to speak, I would note that I appreciate those who worked very hard, including my friends on the floor, on the National Defense Act. Yesterday, that passed with a pretty overwhelming majority, and I voted for it. But as I have noted, that does not provide money; that provides an authorization.

Right now, if we go on continuing resolutions, the Department of Defense will see a multibillion-dollar cut in what is available for them, as will non-defense matters.

So I would urge Senators to work with our leaders and get the appropriations bills done. They could all be done in an omnibus by the end of January, the 1st of February. I would urge Senators to do that. Otherwise, there is going to be a dramatic cut in defense and nondefense matters.

I yield to the senior Senator from New Jersey.

## EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the following nominations, en bloc, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of R. Nicholas Burns, of Massachusetts, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the People's Republic of China; Ramin Toloui, of Iowa, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (Economic and Business Affairs); and Rashad Hussain, of Virginia, to be Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 10 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from New Jersey.

## NOMINATIONS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to express my support for the nominations of Ambassador Nicholas Burns to be Ambassador to China, Mr. Ramin Toloui to be an Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs, and Mr. Rashad Hussain to be Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

These are a superb group of highly qualified nominees, deserving of the positions for which they have been nominated, and I will speak briefly about them.

Ambassador Burns is an outstanding public servant, one of the Nation's best, and I am pleased to support his nomination as the next Ambassador to China. He has a long and distinguished record in public service, including as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs under the Bush administration and U.S. Ambassador to NATO.

If there is a place that we need an Ambassador, it is China. We have spent so much time, both in committee and on the floor, hearing about the challenges of China, but we don't have a U.S. Ambassador to help us meet those challenges.

It is no secret that the China of today is challenging the United States and destabilizing the international community in almost every dimension of power—political, diplomatic, economic, military, and even cultural. That is why Ambassador Burns' experiences and skill will be crucial as he confronts the monumental task ahead of him.

I am also pleased to be supporting Mr. Ramin Toloui's nomination to be the Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs at the State De-

partment. His experience and skill set, including as a former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Finance, where he represented the United States in forums like the G7 and the G20, will be necessary in order to be an effective Assistant Secretary, especially one who will play such a critical role in our economic diplomacy vis-a-vis China and as we must reinvigorate the instruments of our economic diplomacy at home. I believe Mr. Toloui represents the importance of getting our economic statecraft right.

Lastly, I am also pleased to support Mr. Rashad Hussain to be our Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. Throughout his impressive public service, Mr. Hussain has demonstrated his strong commitment to protecting the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, including as the U.S. Special Envoy for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, where he led efforts to counter anti-Semitism and protect Christian minorities in Muslim-majority countries.

Religious freedom, like every human right, is universal, but for many people around the world, this right is out of reach, and religious persecution is on the rise. That is why it is important that we confirm Mr. Hussain.

While it is positive news that we are confirming these three nominees today and a few more, I hope, in the next day, I am deeply concerned that we have more than 50 nominees who will remain pending on the Senate floor, having passed the committee, almost all of them by strong bipartisan votes, who are subject to delays and obstacles.

We are less safe when our national security Agencies are so short-staffed. We owe it to the American people to fix this problem so that we can be represented abroad.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. We yield back also.

Mr. MENENDEZ. We yield back any other time we had.

## VOTE ON BURNS NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The question is, Shall the Senate advise and consent to the Burns nomination?

Mr. MENENDEZ. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER), the Senator from Iowa (Mr. ERNST), the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. FISCHER), the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. LUMMIS), and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS).

The result was announced—yeas 75, nays 18, as follows: